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Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
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STRENGTHENING OF NETWORK ACTIVITIES*

Agenda item 5(d)

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1. Background to the establishment of the RN-SHP

There has been increasing activity in the field of new and renewable sources of energy in the past decade, with small hydro power (SHP) emerging as a major practicable source. This increased activity in countries and regions all over the world necessitates new mechanisms for information and technology transfer at national, regional and even global levels. Thus, the concept of networking has emerged to maximise use of existing resources and help stimulate development in developing countries.

A network for SHP in the Asia-Pacific region specifically has been discussed since the First Seminar/Workshop in Kathmandu, Sept. 1979, and concrete proposals were put forward at the Senior Expert Group Meeting, July 1982. The RN-SHP received official endorsement at the First REDP Steering Committee, May 1983, and since then the Interim Secretariat, located at Hangzhou Regional Centre, HRC, has been actively engaged in building up the Network and co-ordinating its activities.

2. What is the "Network" concept?

> "A network in technology development and transfer consists of a group of institutions in different countries, engaged in a particular field of activity or research, design and development, acting as a group to exchange experience and knowledge, to co-ordinate R+D and to minimise duplication, to undertake joint research, to offer training and advisory services to one another, to disseminate information and generally to co-operate to advance a technology and its application. Every participating institution will have an important role in the network; for convenience of operations, a specific aspect of the technology may be assigned to an institution ———."
>
> (from Senior Expert Group Meeting paper presented by RCTT)

Thus a Network is not a single insti tution but a working arrangement. Networking arrangements involve technical co-operation among several national institutions or focal points to achieve common goals. This form is now favoured, and represents a break from the past when UN regional projects took the form of central institutions, essentially created and run by organizations belonging to the UN system, and often with a post created for an international co-ordinator.

As regards management of the Network, the four main components are

a) the focal points
b) Governing Body
c) Technical Advisory Group
d) Co-ordinator

To initiate regional co-operation it is first and foremost imperative for each participating country to identify its national focal point which would be the basic unit of the networking arrangement. At a regional level, focal points liaise among themselves and also with the Secretariat, which co-ordinates activities, and provides centralized technical and management support. At a national level, the focal points liaise with relevant institutions in their own country. Thus, there are many lines of communication, many linkages, all of which are important to the overall efficient functioning of the network.

It has been proposed that the Governing Body is an inter-governmental body to ensure the Network receives adequate resources and attention at the highest level. However, this may be difficult to realise in practice. The TAG is made up of technical experts and helps in formulating the Network's Work Programme. The Co-ordinator is required to run the Secretariat to ensure smooth working of Network arrangements, and to support focal points in their work. The approach favoured now is to appoint a local rather than an international Co-ordinator.

There is no end of problems and tasks that need to be tackled in the field of SHP, as will be evident in discussions at this TAG meeting.

However, in the context of achieving common goals, the key is active member country participation and a spirit of give and take, of mutual exchange. Every member country will have its strong and weak points, and so can benefit from the Network, especially as we are now in the process of decentralizing activities.

3. How the RN-SHP works in practice at present

The RN-SHP has made steady progress in its 18 months of existence. It consists of 10 SHP Focal Points, with the Interim Secretariat located at China's Focal Point, HRC. The Interim Co-ordinator of the Secretariat is the Director of HRC. As given in Table 1 of "Review of Evaluation of Activities during 1982/83/84", 7 major activities have been completed, and 5 are on-going.

Up to the present, HRC, as Interim Secretariat, has organized and hosted most of the activities, with appropriate liaison and co-operation with SHP focal points and with backstopping by UNIDO and ESCAP-REDP. Participation in activities has come from 15 countries in the Region, covering most countries with active interest in SHP development.

The TAG (Technical Advisory Group) is a key component in the management of RN-SHP activities. It provides giudance and advice to the Interim Co-ordinator in drafting and implementing the Work Programme, and on future modifications to improve the RN-SHP effectiveness. There is no formal Governing Body at present, but some of the functions are undertaken by the REDP Steering Committee as an interim measure. Discussions are beginning on resolving the question of RN-SHP's and the Secretariat's legal status.

Although the RN-SHP exists, functions and has achieved a certain amount of recognition, several problem areas exist:

a) Not all relevant countries have nominated SHP focal points; regular communication channels have not yet been established with the Secretariat. However, with decentralization, then active participation of focal points will automatically ensue.
b) Funding is limited; REDP funds are meant to have a catalytic role, so other donor agencies should be approached; up till now, the major

proportion of funding has come only from UN agencies or member country Governments.

c) Linked to b) is the lack of formal links with donor agencies at a global level, or even with developed countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The question of funding is addressed in a separate report.

4. Ways of Strengthening the Network

4.1. Follow-up action on nomination of SHP Focal Points

The Interim Co-ordinator has written to potential ESCAP member governments on several occasions for SHP Focal Point nominations together with follow-up action from UNDP offices and the REDP Senior Co-ordinator. While most countries in the Region with an active interest in SHP have joined the Network, there are still a few without official nominations.

Thus, the Secretariat proposes to make a fresh approach to the remaining countries, after the TAG meeting has concluded. With a definite Work Programme and sense of direction, the RN-SHP will be a more attractive proposition to be involved in.

The TAG meeting may also wish to suggest ways of improving communications between the Secretariat and Focal Points to ensure more active involvement.

4.2. Nomination of "Associate Members"

The TAG meeting may wish to consider including selected donor agencies and developed countries representatives in RN-SHP activities, in particular for future TAG meetings. This would serve to widen the perspective of future activities and also help to arouse interest in funding the 1985-86 and future Work Programmes. However, it should be borne in mind that funding for TAG meetings is itself restricted, so participation by donor agencies may also be limited.

The experience of ESCAP in including Associate Members should be examined.

4.3. Closer liaison with other networks and similar co-operative arrangements

We are aware of, but have little information on, other Regional Networks such as the BSW (Biogas, Solar and Wind Energy) Network. It would be useful to learn from their experiences, and collaborate further with them where appropriate. We feel UNIDO and ESCAP-REDP would be good sources of information in this respect.

Furthermore, co-operative arrangements such as those that exist in mini-hydro in the ASEAN countries have been particularly successful. It is recommended that the RN-SHP should learn from and strengthen ties with the ASEAN countries for our mutual benefit.

5. The Future

We are breaking new ground in forming a working RN-SHP that meets real needs and priorities. A sound start has been made with support from the UN and several focal points. There are inevitable teething problems, but they are not insurmountable, and we hope that solutions will arise from discussions at the First TAG meeting.

The Network could become a good example of South-South Co-operation. It can facilitate, in a much more direct way, Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries (TCDC). Also, opportunities would exist for external co-operation where appropriate. If we achieve widespread active, rather than token, participation in RN-SHP activities, then the end result will be not just the stimulation of SHP development in the Region, but also the development of a sense of self-reliance at both national and regional levels.